

Are we following the Lord? (2)

Reference: SHM-S10-007-Mw-R00-P2

(Originally spoken on 1 March 2015, edited on 2 March 2015)

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Let us turn to **John 8: 12**

John 8: 12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

The Lord Jesus as the Light of the world is a very major aspect for us to appreciate with regard to who He is, and He tells us that when we follow Him, we will not walk in the darkness but will have the Light of life. So we have seen that this Light is the light that comes from life – spiritual life, the life of God. So if we follow Him, we will have the Light of life.

So what does it mean to follow Him? Are we truly following the Lord?

Let us turn to **Luke 9: 59-60**.

Luke 9: 59-60

59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."

60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."

When we read a passage like this, it may seem to us that it is not very reasonable for the Lord Jesus to say, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." All that this person wanted to do was just to go and bury his father. Was not that a very reasonable request? Should not the Lord have said, "Go ahead. Bury your father then come and follow Me"?

We know the Lord is wise, discerning; He sees the heart. He knows what is within us and what is truly important in life. So He must have a good reason for saying what He did. Why then did He speak in this way?

"Allow the dead to bury their own dead" – Here the Lord Jesus is referring to the spiritual realm. In the spiritual realm, there is life and death; and we know that in this world, much of our activity centres in the area and in the realm of spiritual death. Many things take place, go on in this world, without spiritual life – in a context where God is not truly worshipped, where we are not following Him. So the many things that we are involved in will not have spiritual value if there is not the context of spiritual life.

The Lord said, "... but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Does this mean that the Lord Jesus is saying that burying a person's father, even though he may not be a Christian, is not the right thing to do? We know that that is not so. The Lord has made clear we are to honour our father and mother. So what is it that He means by this?

The underlying issue has to do with our priorities. What is your priority in life? How do you look at situations? How do you respond based on what is most important?

Here the Lord Jesus was telling this person, "...go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God", as an expression of "following Me". He called on this person, "Follow Me" but he was hesitant; he had things to do. We can say he had earthly responsibilities to fulfil.

In another situation, the Lord told someone else, "...foxes have holes... birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Are you willing to follow Me in such a context?" We have seen that this applies to physical situations of life – how far are we prepared to go to follow the Lord?

Here the Lord Jesus refers to the area of earthly responsibilities. How much priority do we give to our earthly responsibilities in the context of the spiritual and eternal? Where God calls, will we obey? When we know that God wants us to fulfil an important task, will we say, "Wait, I have other things to attend to"?

These "other things" apply to a very large area of life. In fact, it applies to all areas that we are involved in in this world. For someone young, it may be your studies – that is your earthly responsibility – or housework that you need to do. As you grow older, you may be looking for a job; you have responsibilities. Or you get married, you have children; you have family responsibilities; and so too as a citizen, there are earthly responsibilities.

So there are many responsibilities on this earth that we have. How do we respond? How much weight do we give to these areas? How much do they occupy our minds, our concentration, our thoughts?

When God calls, are we ready to move or will we say, "Wait, wait. Let me do this first; let me do that first. I have many things I need to do first"?

If we say that then the Lord may say to us, "Go ahead, do them first. I am going off." So we may not be able to follow Him after we have finished doing the things that we want to do.

If we want to truly follow the Lord, that earthly responsibilities must always be subjected to what the Lord says and what He wants to accomplish.

We look at how the Lord Jesus Himself responded in this area:

Mark 3: 31-35

- 31 Then His mother and His brothers *arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him.
- 32 A crowd was sitting around Him, and they *said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."
- 33 Answering them, He *said, "**Who are My mother and My brothers?**"
- 34 Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He *said, "**Behold My mother and My brothers!**"
- 35 "**For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.**"

In such a context, we may think that a good son would surely respond rapidly to the call of the mother. Here we are told His mother and His brothers *arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him. It was a specific request from the mother and the brothers. Would it not be very reasonable for Him to say, "Yes, I will come immediately"? Would not that be an expression of a good son?

But the Lord Jesus' response was very different from what we might expect: He *said, "**Who are My mother and My brothers?**" And looking around at the people around Him, He made this statement: "**Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.**"

So He wants us to understand that ultimately, what has true value is in the spiritual realm, in the moral realm; it has to do with our relationship with God.

True quality relationship must be based on the moral and spiritual. "... whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother" – that is what brings us together in terms of moral meaning and direction.

Having said that, some may then think: "Does it therefore mean that I need not look after my parents, brothers and sisters; I need not fulfil my earthly responsibilities if I concentrate on spiritual service? If I give myself to God, concentrate on spiritual service, helping people to come to know the Lord then I do not need to fulfil all these responsibilities?"

The Lord Jesus responded to the Pharisees and told them, "You teach the people to go astray. You tell them if they were to tell their parents, 'What you would have benefited from Me has been offered to God', they need not fulfil their responsibilities towards their parents"; and that, the Lord Jesus said, was hypocrisy.

So then how do we bring them together? On the one hand we must have the right spiritual priorities and perspective; at the same time we have earthly responsibilities that God expects us to fulfil.

A beautiful passage can be seen in **John 19: 25-27**.

John 19: 25-27

- 25 Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.
- 26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He *said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"
- 27 Then He *said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*.

Consider this situation: the Lord Jesus suffering the most intense suffering of His life, dying on the cross, and He spoke to His mother and said, "Woman, behold, your son!" and He was not referring to Himself; "your son" was not a reference to the Lord Jesus Himself.

"Woman, behold, your son!" was a reference to the disciple whom He loved standing nearby. He was telling His mother Mary: "...behold, your son – My disciple". Then He *said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!"

So He helped to establish a relationship between His mother and His disciple so that His mother would be looked after, taken care of, and we are told: From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*.

His mother had looked after Him so many years of His life. He appreciated that; He made sure that she would be taken care of. And in the time of His great agony and suffering, He was conscious of her need and He made this special arrangement and told His disciple – likely the apostle John – to take care of His mother, to treat Mary as his own mother, and the disciple obeyed.

So here we see a beautiful expression of the way we ought to live our lives. The Lord Jesus fulfilled His earthly responsibility in taking care of His mother but He did not do so at the expense of His commitment to God.

His commitment to God and the fulfilment of the will of God was always primary. That is why when His mother and His brothers arrived and sent word to Him and called Him, He did not respond by going to them immediately. He had an important work to do and He would not be interrupted. He had to continue to fulfil what He understood was His mission.

But at this point of time as He was dying on the cross, He had come to the fulfilment and completion of His mission from God. He was now dying for the sins of the whole world – that was His mission in this world; He came to be the Saviour of the world. He would not allow anything to move Him away from that.

And as He fulfilled the will of God and gave priority to the moral and spiritual, He fulfilled His earthly responsibility in taking care of His mother and in so doing, it brought forth a very powerful moral and spiritual message of His love for her, His concern for her well-being, in the context of His love for all mankind.

This is something that all of us need to ponder about. Are we preoccupied with the things of this world? Whether it be in the area of enjoyment or in the area of earthly responsibility, are we so absorbed in these things that our heart is not close to God? Yes, God looks at our heart, not just at the outward things that we are doing. He wants to know where your heart is: What do you truly value, what is most important to you?

At the same time He knows that we can use this as an excuse not to fulfil our earthly responsibilities. Looking after parents can be very difficult; fulfilling a difficult task in a job may not be appealing; helping someone in need may be quite taxing. So we can say, "I am occupied with spiritual responsibility, I am serving God. I have no time for all these things." We can use that as an excuse.

So God wants us to see clearly that first, we must not be absorbed, preoccupied with the things of this world even though they may be reasonable earthly responsibilities. Our heart must be absorbed in God and what is important to Him. It is vital that we establish a deep living relationship with God, alive and effective in our daily living. We are conscious of Him, we pray without ceasing, we seek Him for guidance, we understand what is in His heart, what is important to Him, we are identified with Him.

It is in that context, with that spirit that we now fulfil our earthly responsibilities.

We pray for our parents, for our brothers and sisters, for people around us and seek to understand what God wants us to do. And what God may expect one person to do may be different from what He expects of another in a similar situation because the meaning involved can be very different.

Each one of us will have to seek God to understand what is appropriate, what is suitable for us. Let us not be too quick to jump to conclusions: "So and so should do this; that person ought to have done that." We may not know enough to understand what really is suitable and appropriate in the eyes of God.

What is important is for each one of us to seek God humbly to make sure that our lives are right before Him. If God is pleased with us then the things that we do arising from that will be meaningful and the way we care for others, fulfil our responsibilities will have a spiritual meaning and impact.

Even though they may be earthly responsibilities, there will be a spiritual witness because of the life with which we seek to contribute our part. There will be the light that will shine. Men will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Just by being what we ought to be, the light will shine.

So the Lord Jesus is the Light of the world. If we want to shine like Him, if we want to have the Light of life in us, we must learn to follow Him.

We must ponder over what it means to follow Him. This is something that all of us need to consider, ponder over throughout our lives. It is not a one-time understanding; it is a lifetime commitment and a growing and developing walk with God.

God is patient with us; He is prepared to help us in the midst of our failures, but we must respond well, we must be prepared to learn. And if we are, God will help us to grow well, to develop in increasing quality.

Let us then as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to understand the right approach to life in this world.

Our time on earth is very short; how we live has eternal consequences. Let us ask the Lord to teach us how to have the right priority as we live each day and to fulfil our responsibilities in fellowship with Him, so that we will be a light that shines in this world to rescue men from the darkness.

Let us thank the Lord for what He has done for us and ask Him to teach us how to be a good disciple.